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ABSTRACT

Preliminary results are given from a study of 10 programs that have developed alternative ways to link professional services with various forms of informal helping networks by serving a variety of populations including the elderly, children and families, the physically disabled and the general community. Characteristics of the different types of helping networks that have been identified are presented, along with information about the various relationships staff have developed with informal helpers. A typology of five emerging forms of collaboration is developed. Several sets of issues for policy and practice that have surfaced from the experience of staff in the 10 programs are discussed. (Author)

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Professional Partnerships with Informal Helpers:

Emerging Forms

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Professional Partnerships with Informal Helpers: Emerging Forms

Several recent policy statements have focussed upon the relationship between formal sources of help provided by professional service agencies and the informal helping sources that many of us turn to in everyday life. (President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978; Strengthening Families Through Informal Support Systems, 1979; National Commission on Neighborhoods, 1979). In the concern for assuring that citizens have a comprehensive range of formal services available to help them in times of need or with specific problems, the fact that informal helping resources may also be available and appropriate has often been overlooked. Neighbors, friends, storekeepers, ministers, not to mention family members, all have important helping roles to play. The task for public policy is to understand how formal and informal sources of help can interact synergistically rather than destructively.

This paper presents early results from a research project concerned with understanding the potential for cooperation between formal and informal helping systems. It is based on a study of ten programs that have developed different ways of linking formal services with informal helping networks. Together, these programs offer a preliminary account of the possibilities and problems involved in attempting to mount such an effort. Eventually, data from thirty programs will be included in the study. This discussion therefore, can only be viewed as suggestive of the themes and findings that will emerge from more extensive data and analyses. It is presented at this early stage in order to provoke discussion and feedback about an area of policy and program that is

becoming increasingly intriguing to professionals.

Research Approach.

The research underlying these ten case studies began with an ideal model that included definitions of what was meant by formal services and by helping networks and hypotheses about the nature of the interactions between the two.[1] In general, formal services were seen as agencies employing professional staff, with an operational program of services oriented to human service objectives. In addition the programs were to be aware of and attempting to link up with informal helping networks. We also had a number of expectations about the informal network and its links to the agency. A helping network was generally expected to be a set of relationships between people who were performing informal helping roles and other individuals linked to helpers by neighborhood proximity, personal acquaintance, or common concern. Relationships were expected to have arisen spontaneously, in a setting not necessarily connected with the agency, with informal exchanges of help and assistance freely given and based on mutuality. The interaction between the agency and such a helping network was expected to have several key attributes. Agency staff were expected to have an explicit methodology or set of criteria by which they identified helping networks to interact with the informal helpers as equals, and to be sensitive to ethnic and cultural values. The intent of intervention was expected to be directed to reaching a broader group of individuals through the helping network than could be reached in the typical casework approach.

We were also interested in understanding how the concept could be extended to a number of different types of problems, agency settings and

community contexts. This brought the traditional split between theory and practice into the picture as it soon became clear that ideal expectations were not possible or appropriate in all circumstances. The realization that neighborhoods were not relevant to some problems, that networks differed in form and function according to situational exigencies, and that many agencies were involved in an exploratory and developmental endeavor which resulted in dramatic changes over time in what they were doing and how they conceptualized it, led to some need to relax the formal requirements of the study. Programs were selected that came as close as possible to meeting sample expectations with the resulting ten programs providing a basis to define a larger sample for study later in the research.

Thus what is represented more basically by the ten programs discussed in this paper is a commitment to a philosophy of practice. The programs offer a considerable diversity of problems, objectives, approaches and operations, to be sure. Yet underlying this diversity are some common themes: a philosophy that values the process of informal helping, a commitment to understanding in depth how informal helping works, and a determination to develop ways in which professionally trained staff may usefully relate their objectives and activities to this process.

The ten programs selected after a national search are presented in Table 1. Site visits were made to each of the ten programs to interview staff members and helpers, and to compile program literature and available evaluative information. Information about the following major aspects of each program was collected:

* neighborhood and community characteristics

* organization and management of agency
* characteristics of program staff
* types of helpers and helping networks
* interaction between helpers and staff
* policy and program implications and issues.

A case study was written for each program.[2] Then the case studies and other data were content analyzed to identify similarities and contrasts in approach and operation.

Insert Table 1

Program Overview.

While data was collected on contextual factors such as the characteristics of neighborhoods and agencies in which these programs were found, this paper focuses primarily on the nature of the informal helping activities and the interactions between informal helpers and professionals.

Briefly, the programs were found in several contexts ranging from sparsely settled rural areas to deteriorated inner cities. Some were operating in areas with strong local identity and a high level of interaction. Others were found in areas where there was little or no neighborhood identity, although most of the areas did have stable populations. Some programs were not neighborhood based at all and related instead to a dispersed population with a common problem or need.

The agencies involved in these programs exhibited some variation but also had some common elements. None of them were large state or federal agencies such as public welfare agencies. Some programs were undertaken

explicitly as demonstration or research projects while others represented the outgrowth of an attempt by an agency to develop a better relationship with an area or target population, sometimes at the demand of the client group. No program had been in operation longer than six years and most were less than four years old. All of the programs were small with from two to nine staff members.

The ten programs in the sample served a range of target populations: three serving the elderly, two serving children, youth and families, one serving developmentally disabled, and four serving the general community.

Linking Formal Services with Informal Helping.

When looked at individually, each of the ten programs offers a unique blending of formal and informal ways of helping people. Factors such as the types of problems and client populations each agency works with, the stability of the neighborhood or community in which clients live, the legal and political climate encountered by the agency, the agency's organizational base and the personalities of the staff and informal helpers all serve to influence the various directions that may be pursued in linking the efforts of professional staff and informal helpers. In spite of this diversity, having a common philosophy insures some comparability.

In order to identify common elements as well as important differences among these approaches, two major dimensions have been identified and analysed. The programs have been categorized according to the kind of helping networks with which staff are involved and by the characteristics of the relationships between agency staff and informal helpers. Taking the analytical process one step further, a typology of five agency approaches was developed based on the clustering of the underlying

dimensions. For this purpose, each of the helping networks enlisted by the agencies as well as the kinds of interactions occurring between staff and helpers were content analysed from case study material. Since several agencies were working with more than one helping network the resulting comparisons are based on observations of fourteen different approaches among the ten programs.

Characteristics of Helping Networks.

The kinds of helping networks that staff are linked with vary according to the different objectives of the programs. This simply means that staff have reasons for seeking informal sources of help and these reasons are major influences in the way they define and identify a helping network. Several patterns emerge. Some programs focus exclusively on a given client, e.g. an elderly widow, and are concerned with identifying the personal support network of that individual. Staff may draw upon outside support resources when the existing personal network of a client is limited or not supportive. In these instances, the boundaries of the helping network are largely tied to an individual client although more group oriented helping may occur.

Another type of network activity involves a wider focus on the needs of a population group and is concerned with promoting mutual aid or self help networks within that group. In two programs, this involved tapping into existing networks of mutual aid. Two other programs took the direction of creating self help networks among their clients. Whether existing or created, the resource of informal mutual aid shares similarities with the helping that occurs within organized self help

groups in that individuals come together on the basis of shared problems or circumstances (Katz and Bender, 1976). The important difference is that the informal helping that transpires within the mutual aid network is free of the influences of formal charter and organization that characterize many self help groups. Helping is more dependent on maintaining norms of reciprocity than supporting a group identity or organizational philosophy.

A third major focus is on helping networks based on geographical propinquity. Several agencies have adopted this focus when program objectives are directed to community wide issues or to populations clearly identified with a defined locality. Several programs adopting this perspective have gone about identifying key figures within neighborhood areas, people who perform central helping roles, so called "natural helpers" (Collins and Pancoast, 1976). For example, a program serving the elderly has identified natural helpers who are instrumental in looking after a large number of elderly individuals by providing emotional support and assistance with shopping, meals, or transportation. Another program responsible for housing assistance and community development has identified neighborhood based lay facilitators who provide information, advice and referral to residents regarding public services.

While these programs have identified existing, locality based helping networks; others have attempted to foster them. For programs concerned with creating community networks, various types of community representatives have been identified such as school officials, clergy, storekeepers or simply knowledgeable residents who are then organized

into helping networks by program staff.

Table 2 summarizes the variety of helping networks that staff of the ten programs have enlisted in their work. The examples are classified according to three different bases for defining a network, i.e., individual, population group, or locality, as well as to whether the network exists independent of the program or whether the program played a role in creating the network.

Insert Table 2

These various forms of informal helping networks, whether based on personal support needs, mutual aid or on a particular locality, are only three instances of the more encompassing phenomenon of informal helping. What distinguishes this set of examples is the active involvement, in a planned way, of agency personnel with informal helpers and helping activities. It is too early to say whether these types of informal helping are the only or even most feasible types for professional activities.

Types of Relationships.

The relationship between professional staff and informal helpers is an important element in the way helping networks are identified or created, determining both the types of help exchanged and the purpose and meaning of such exchanges. The variety of relationships developed are a result of the different personalities, backgrounds and cultures of the staff of the programs and the helping networks with which they are involved. These relationships can be classified by examining the variety

of postures that professional staff adopt when working with informal helpers. Often professional helping is based on standards of training and experience; knowledge and expertise are valued in establishing the credibility of the help provided. For informal helpers, these standards may have little meaning as helping may be based on informal personal relationships, shared experiences, and altruism, with credibility more dependent on the norms of exchange within the network. Both types of helping have value; the relationship formed between the two must acknowledge the value of each type while coming to terms with issues involving differences in responsibility, authority and status.

So far, three different types of relationships seem to characterize the range of orientations professional staff and informal helpers have adopted among the ten programs. These may be termed collegial, coordinative and directive. A collegial relationship between staff and helpers is characterized by mutual independence; each respects the other and each determines what their tasks of helping are to be. Staff often provide support and consultation to helpers as colleagues. A program that works with kin, friends and neighbors of an elderly client is illustrative of this type of relationship in which staff periodically call up significant helpers within the client's personal network to ask how things are going, whether any assistance is needed, and to support what the helper has been doing. A coordinative relationship retains many of the informal features of a collegial relationship in that staff and helpers perform separate functions with equal authority. However, as the name implies, staff coordinate or organize many of the helpers' activities in accomplishing

various tasks. For example, staff of a program in San Antonio which is concerned with elderly Mexican Americans have organized task forces of natural helpers to provide services to their elderly neighbors. Individual helpers make their own decisions about the help they provide but staff coordinate the activities of several helpers to provide a full range of services from home maintenance to social and health services. In the last type of relationship, directive, staff assume a more supervisory role in working with helpers. A program in Houston concerned with promoting independent living for the severely disabled illustrates this type of relationship. Staff identify individuals who are particularly knowledgeable or skillful with respect to some aspect of independent living, e.g., managing the attendants who help to care for them, and recruit them to provide training to severely disabled clients. Although many aspects of the relationships between staff and the helpers in this program are non-directive, staff both decide the skill areas in which helpers are to provide instruction and specify how training should be provided. In these respects, staff play a more directive role in the range of tasks informal helpers are to perform.

The three types of relationships were compared along six dimensions of interaction between staff and helper--focus, formality, organization, training, type of helping exchange and expected duration of the relationship. These dimensions are defined as follows:

focus - whether the objectives of the interaction are primarily directed to client problems or community issues:

formality - whether formal titles or explicit role definitions are

employed (formal) or whether helper's roles are defined more informally;

organization - whether staff interact with helpers primarily on a one-to-one basis or in a group;

training - whether a formal or structured training program is offered to helpers, informal training occurs in helping activities or no training is provided to helpers;

type of helping exchange - whether the help provided by helpers is more affective (involving exchanges of emotional support, advice or information) or is instrumental (involving exchanges of resources such as transportation or yard work and task focussed activity such as program development or community organizing);

expected duration - whether there is an expectation that the relationship between staff and helpers is open and may continue indefinitely, or whether the relationship is more time limited and will end upon the completion of a task or resolution of a particular problem.

Insert Table 3

Table 3, showing the resulting comparisons, highlights several differences among the types of relationships developed between staff and helping networks. Most "collegial" relationships are shown to be focussed on client-oriented objectives involving affective exchanges of help. Helping roles are not formally defined, no training is provided helpers and staff generally relate to helpers on a one-to-one basis with the duration of the relationship being more open ended. In contrast, a coordinative type of relationship is usually focussed on community level issues and

involves more instrumental exchanges of help or assistance. Staff and helper relate informally on a group basis, informal training is usually provided and relationships are expected to be more time limited in duration. Only two programs were classified as having directive relationships between staff and helpers and thus the data do not permit easy generalizations. The directive type of relationship does appear to reflect a more formal and structured helping interaction.

A Typology of Agency Approaches.

A comparison of the types of helping networks along with the corresponding relationships developed between program staff and helpers within the networks provides a framework for examining the alternative approaches the ten programs have adopted in practice. Shown in Table 4, five types of approaches can be generalized.

Insert Table 4

Personal Network Intervention - this approach focusses on existing relationships of an individual client. Agency staff develop collegial relationships with kin, friends or neighbors who are significant in providing help to a client. This approach is illustrated by a program serving elderly where staff identify helpers within the client's network and provide support and consultation to affirm and sustain this resource for a client.

Volunteer Linking - this approach also focuses on a client's personal network but is concerned with augmenting or creating additional helping resources for a client. The approach involves a more directive stance

on the part of agency staff in which informal helpers are recruited, sometimes trained, to provide support or assistance to a client. Several programs in the sample have adopted this approach. A program working with child abuse families enlists and trains helpers to provide support and companionship to isolated parents. Another program concerned with creating independent living options for the severely physically disabled recruits helpers who provide training in independent living skills as well as links to community resources for medically rehabilitated but socially isolated disabled clients.

Mutual Aid Networks - this approach adopts a focus on a client populations experiencing similar problems, stressful experiences or circumstances and involves collaborating with an existing self help group or alternatively creating a network among a group of clients. Relationships may be more collegial when the mutual aid group has been established without staff effort with a more coordinative relationship characteristic of staff created groups. This approach has been adopted by four of the programs in the sample. A program working with senior citizens has developed a relationship with a senior social activities group called "The Golden Age Club" as a way to reduce social isolation among the elderly. Club members often provide transportation assistance, help with shopping as well as outreach to elderly clients. Another program concerned with creating options for child care, has organized a mutual aid network among family day care mothers to promote exchange of resources.

Neighborhood Helpers - focussing on a particular geographical

locality, this approach usually involves canvassing a neighborhood to identify "natural helpers" within existing helping networks with staff attempting to form collegial relationships and to strengthen or support the role of the natural helpers. Four programs have adopted this approach. A senior center situated in a neighborhood with a high number of elderly citizens keeps a helping resource file of neighborhood helpers who have provided assistance to elderly residents and others. Staff consult with the helpers and often call upon them when someone in the neighborhood needs help.

Community Empowerment - similar in focus to the neighborhood helping approach, the community empowerment approach shifts attention to creating or organizing helping networks among community residents in order to develop a "community voice" or build a community's capacity for self help. Three programs in the sample illustrate this strategy. A program serving a southside community in Milwaukee has organized residents into a number of committees that are directed to a variety of community problems, e.g., family communication, widowed, elderly, youth. Each committee is structured so as to leave residents in control of activities and agendas.

These five approaches have certain implications for how professional activities should be keyed to the needs of particular informal modes of helping. One thing that emerges from the comparisons, for example, is a certain concordance of the character of the relationship developed between staff and helpers and the source of the helping network, i.e., whether it was preexisting or created in response to

the program. In none of the instances where the helping network was created by the activities of the agency's program could the character of the relationship between staff and helpers be considered collegial. This type of relationship occurs exclusively with preexisting networks. However, for some preexisting population or locality-based helping networks staff have developed coordinative relationships. This usually has occurred where the nature of the helping exchange is task oriented involving program development or community organizing objectives.

The association between existing and created networks and the type of staff/helper relationship has an intuitive explanation. An established network of helping relationships carries with it implicit expectations or norms; professional staff are essentially outsiders who must adapt or integrate themselves within such a network. This is best done when the approach is collegial and respectful of established helping roles and activities. Where staff play a more active role in fostering the development of a helping network, they also have more opportunity for structuring or directing the helping network; this notion is supported by the preponderance of coordinative or directive relationships associated with the helping networks created by staff within the ten programs.

The typology may offer a way to conceptualize these approaches so that other issues of practice and policy may be more clearly understood. While this typology is based on empirical evidence from a limited number of programs, it resembles those developed by several authors based on literature reviews and thus has more general application (Gottlieb, 1979; Erickson, 1975; Pilisuk, Chandler and D'Onofrio, 1978; Schon, 1977; Froland, 1979).

Issues for Policy and Practice.

In the course of studying the ten programs, a number of more general issues have also emerged which bear on policy and practice. These issues can be briefly stated as questions to highlight some of the dilemmas faced by formal agency staff in their program development.

Staff Role - how do staff accomodate professional identities, norms and values to helpers who do not have a professional perspective? In some instances, there may be differences in assumptions and interests between professionals as they view their work and helpers whose views are more related to the informal network within which they are embedded. Sometimes this tension may be dealt with by procedures of staff recruitment and training although value differences may persist. Can there be an attitude of equal status when one party may consider knowledge, skills, and training to establish the legitimacy of helping while the other relies on friendship and mutual aid in providing help?

Agency Organization - there are several ways in which being part of a formal organization may raise issues for staff. First, funding sources and demands for accountability often either impose requirements for documentation which may prove disruptive or eligibility rules which may create arbitrary limits in working with informal helping networks. Second, a greater degree of organizational complexity and specialization often provides barriers to a free flow of communication or mitigates against the close personal relationships that are a part of working with networks. Finally, whether staff members consider themselves representa-

tives of a formal organization or more or less free agents will alter their relationships to a helping network or perhaps determine the type of network they may enlist in their work.

Helper Role - the issue of what a "natural" helper is or becomes in the context of working with staff of a formal service agency raises several questions. First, how much does the process of formalizing the helper's role automatically occur in the course of relating to a formal agency and are the consequences of formalization positive or negative? Some agencies seem particularly concerned to maintain privacy and informality in their work with helpers while others provide training or payment to helpers which serves to explicitly define a set of role expectations. At what point does formalization occur and for what purposes is it incompatible?

Role of Helping Networks - helping networks are not a simple or homogeneous social collectivity but vary widely in purpose, membership and structure. In situations where there are internal value conflicts among members of a network, where norms of reciprocity may hinder certain kinds of helping or where the network is characterized by cliques that serve to exclude people from membership, the role of a helping network in working with an agency may become ambiguous. How do these factors influence who an agency staff can and cannot serve if they are to establish links with a helping network?

Relating the Formal to the Informal - Interaction between an agency and helping networks depends upon the nature of exchange and the compatibility of objectives and values to which such exchange is directed.

What happens when there is a difference in objectives? An agency concerned with promoting self sufficiency and a network concerned with obtaining tangible resources may encounter difficulties in coming to a common basis for exchange. One may want to be non-directive while the other may be asking for direction. Further, some agencies see themselves as phasing out their work with a network while others are concerned with developing an ongoing relationship. What kinds of helping networks or what types of informal helping are suited to these contrasting objectives? Finally, in working with neighborhoods or helping networks with strong norms deriving from tradition or culture, to what extent must agency staff adapt themselves to these norms if they are effectively to relate to informal helpers? What is gained and lost in the process of adaptation?

These sets of questions call for caution in approaching the task of blending formal services with informal sources of help. The various approaches adopted by the ten programs illustrate how matters of context, purpose, interaction and role definition may be considered and decided upon in practice. Yet, the programs offer only partial answers that must be refined by further experience with alternative strategies of development in different settings. We know there are ample reasons for professionals to begin working with informal helping networks and that there is a developing body of experience to suggest ways that this might be done. We must also turn our attention to examining the consequences of these efforts in order to clarify and understand emerging issues for policy and practice.

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Footnotes

1. Report #1, Sampling Design, Regional Research for Human Services. Portland, Oregon, January, 1979.

2. Report #2, Natural Helping Networks and Service Delivery, A Sampler of Agency Experience, Regional Research Institute for Human Services, Portland, Oregon, May, 1979.

Table 1 Description of Programs

AGENCY/DURATION	LOCATION	AFFILIATION	FOCUS	GOAL	APPROACH
1) Chicago commons Association 1-2 years	"New City" Chicago Urban	Private	Neighborhood residents	Strengthening ties & encouraging self-help /mutual aid	Identify natural helpers
2) M.A.S.H. 2-3 years	San Antonio Texas Urban	Centro del Barrio Univ. of Texas Private	Elderly	To promote mutual aid Reduce social isolation	Identify natural helpers Recruit to Task Forces to solve locally identified needs.
3) South Community Organization 1-2 years	Milwaukee Urban	Neighborhood & Family Services Project Private	Neighborhood residents	capacity building neighborhood control	Promote lay identification of need supply lay helpers
4) "Facilitator" Program 3-4 years	Durham,NC Urban	Duke Univ. Private	Health & housing in neighborhoods	Primary prevention by strengthening natural ties	Educate natural helpers "facilitators" in problem area Support their helping efforts
5) S.C.A.N. 4-5 years	Little Rock Arkansas Rural	Dept. of Social Services Private	Child abuse	Keeping families together Teaching basic parenting, survival skills	Train lay workers to work w/one or two families-serving as friend and role model
6) New Options: Transitional Living Program 3-4 years	Houston, Texas Urban	Texas Ins. for Rehabilitation & Research Private	Disabled	Community integration of severly disabled	Training by peers Modeling in independent living skills
7) Tiyospaye 3-4 years	Rosebud Sioux Reservation S. Dakota Rural	Rosebud Medicine Men & Assoc. Sinte Gleska Col. Private	Lakota Sioux Indian Community	Demonstrate preventive power of traditional culture	Organize, revitalize traditional cultural elements
8) Neighborhood House 3-4 years	Portland, Oregon Urban	Private non-profit	Elderly	Alleviate social isolation Coordinate services	Identify helpers, encourage & share information
9) Kaufman Center 2-3 years	Eugene, Oregon Urban	Eugene Parks & Recreation Public	Elderly	Provide options Strengthen ties	Recruit "Block" workers to visit report, informal visiting
10) N.O.C.C. Neighborhood Options for Childcare 2-3 years	Portland Oregon Urban	Private non-profit	Daycare families & providers	To promote neighborhood self-reliance in daycare To encourage & coordinate providers	Create, support parent & provider networks & self-help efforts.

Table 2 Types of Helping Networks

Basis	Source: Existing	Source: Created
Individual	personal network of individual client	linking helper to individual client
Population	mutual aid network	linking similar individuals for mutual aid
Locality	central figures in neighborhood network	organizing community representatives

Table 3

Dimensions of Rela ionships
Between Formal and Informal Helpers*

	Type of Relationship		
	Collegial	Coordinative	Directive
Focus			
Client	4	3	2
Community	0	5	0
Formality			
Formal	0	2	2
Informal	4	6	0
Organization			
One-to-one	3	1	1
Group	1	7	1
Training			
Formal	0	1	1
Informal	0	5	0
None	4	2	1
Type of Help			
Affective	4	2	1
Instrumental	0	6	1
Expected Duratio			
Limited	1	7	2
Open	3	1	0

*(Note: Figures based on staff-helper interaction among fourteen different helping networks across the ten programs.)

Table 4

A Typology of Approaches for Working with Informal Helping Networks

Approach	Focus	Source	Relationship	Objectives
Personal Network	Individual	Existing	Collegial	Strengthen existing support
Volunteer Linking	Individual	Created	Directive	Develop support system, social integration
Mutual Aid Network	Population group	Existing/ created	Coordinative	Promote sharing and support of mutual problems
Neighborhood Helpers	Locality	Existing	Collegial	Strengthen neighborhood self help
Community Empowerment	Locality	Created	Coordinative	Build community capacity for problem solving